

Lying in Defense

Pentagon

The more unreliable the polygraph is shown to be, the more determinedly the Defense Department relies upon it. This is known as zeal. It is characterized by a redoubling of efforts as their purposes are forgotten. Initially, one supposes, the polygraph was employed at Defense in the naive notion that it defended, something. A couple of years ago, however, the Department received a report, based on an extensive survey, that no data could be found "to support the view held by polygraph examiners that lie detection is an effective procedure." Answering questions about this report the other day, a Pentagon spokesman said that use of lie detector tests will continue "with appropriate safeguards."

What is an appropriate safeguard for a lie detector? The answer, we believe, is that the only appropriate safeguard is to be found in men and women sensible and self-respecting enough to reject this machine-age form of witch-doctoring. Obviously, if the lie detector is to be used at all, there must be lie detection tests for the examiners and for the examiners of the examiners and so on until everyone in the Pentagon is engulfed in the universal hysteria of distrust and accusation. Secretary McNamara will have to take a lie detector test every time he tells the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that things are flourishing in South Viet-Nam, and Assistant Secretary Sylvester will of course insist on a lie detector test to check on the veracity of every Pentagon official who grants an interview to any newsman.

But when that day comes, there will be no further need for a Defense Department. For we shall have surrendered the very values which the Defense Department was instituted to defend.